



## State of New Jersey

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Dear Pet Rodent Purchaser:

We hope that you have many hours enjoying your new pet and that you closely follow pet shop instructions on it's proper care to make sure it stays happy and healthy.

We also feel it is important for pet owners to stay healthy themselves by practicing Safe Handling Practices for Pet Rodents, as explained below. Virtually all animals can carry germs that may infect humans and pet rodents are no exception. Some simple precautions can reduce the risk of owners getting sick from their pet:

#### **Safe Handling Practices for Pet Rodents\***

- Wash hands with soap and water after handling pet rodents or cleaning up pet droppings, cages and use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when soap is unavailable.
- Keep rodent cages clean and free of soiled bedding.
- Clean cages outdoors, or in a well-ventilated area.
- Moisten bedding before removal from cages to decrease resultant dust.
- Closely supervise young children, especially those less than five years old, when cleaning cages or handling rodents; supervise or assist children in washing their hands immediately after handling rodents and rodent cages or bedding.
- Do not kiss or hold pet rodents close to the face.
- Never allow pet rodents to come into contact with wild rodents or their droppings or nests.
- If your pet rodent dies, use gloves to remove it from the cage, double bag the body and dispose of it in the trash. Do not reuse the cage until it has been cleaned and disinfected using a dilute bleach solution (one-half cup of bleach to one gallon of water) or a household disinfectant according to the manufacturer's instructions.

A low percentage of hamsters and other pet rodents may be infected with a virus called **Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis (LCM)**. Pet rodents can become infected from contact with wild rodents at a breeding facility, pet store or home. Humans can develop LCM infection from exposure to rodent urine, droppings, saliva, or nesting material of infected rodents. The number of documented human LCM infections from pet hamsters and other rodents is very low. Most people who become infected never have symptoms of illness or have a very mild, self-limited, flu-like illness. Some people are at a higher risk of more serious disease if they become infected with LCM. This "high-risk group" includes pregnant women and individuals with weakened immune systems. LCM infection during pregnancy can cause severe birth defects and fetal death. Along with the above safe handling practices, the following precautions can reduce the risk for acquiring LCM and other infections from pet rodents:

- High-risk individuals, as described above, should either not own a pet rodent or have someone else in the household care for pet rodents. Rodents should be housed in a separate room from high-risk individuals, who should not handle rodents, cages or other materials in contact with rodents.
- Because there is no definitive test for a live animal that can provide reliable answers about its LCM status, blood testing of pet rodents is not recommended.
- Pet rodents must not be released into the wild. This is a violation of New Jersey animal cruelty and wildlife laws.
- Persons with specific concerns regarding the health of their pets should seek guidance from a veterinarian.

\*Adapted from material available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)